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FORT WORTH
'WHERE THE WEST BEGINS'

MONDAY NOVEMBER 6 2017

$2

Partly sunny
83°/61° See 9A

Star-Telegram

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'THIS IS HORRIFIC'

NICK WAGNER AP

Carrie Matula (left) said she heard the shooting at the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs from the gas station where she works a block away.

26 murdered at Baptist church in tiny town southeast of San Antonio

Staff and wire reports

The 26 victims of the largest mass shooting in Texas history ranged from 5 to 72 years old.

They were killed Sunday at First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs. Few of the victims had been identified by Sunday evening, but they include the 14-year-old daughter of the church's pastor.

An additional 20 people were wounded.

MORE INSIDE

Gun-control supporters are frustrated, again **4A**

Region, nation have long history of mass shootings **5A**

As the shooter left, he was confronted by an armed resident who chased him. A short time later, he was found dead in his vehicle. Several weapons were found inside and it was unclear if the attacker died of a self-inflicted wound or if he was shot by the resident who confronted him.

"It's something we all say does not happen in small communities, although we found out today it does," said Joe Tackitt, the sheriff of Wilson County, which includes Sutherland Springs.

Officials, including Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, declined to discuss a possible motive Sunday night. Abbott did attend a

SEE SHOOTING, 3A

DARREN ABATE AP

Law enforcement officers gather in front of the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs after Sunday's fatal shooting.

BOB OWEN SanAntonio Express-News via TNS

A group gathered in prayer outside the Sutherland Springs Community Center after a mass shooting at the town's First Baptist Church on Sunday.

Church where mass shooting took place was center of community

BY JIM VERTUNO, NOMAAN MERCHANT AND DIANA HEIDGERD
The Associated Press

SUTHERLAND SPRINGS

The most recent sermon posted on YouTube by the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs shows him explaining why he had parked a motorcycle in front of his lectern.

As he walked side to side on stage, Frank Pomeroy explained in the video posted Oct. 29 that he wanted to discuss having faith in forces that can't be seen, be they gravity during a sharp turn or God.

"Just as leaning into a turn may not make sense, leaning into God is the way we should go, because God's got it figured out, whether we do or not," Pomeroy said.

The white wood-frame church where a gunman opened fire Sunday was at the center of life in Sutherland Springs, one of the hundreds of tiny towns that dot rural Texas. A week after the video was posted, one of those killed was Pomeroy's 14-year-old daughter, Annabelle.

Local and federal law enforcement swarmed the community and blocked off access to the church hours after residents reported hearing gunfire. Regina Rodriguez walked up to the police barricade a few hours after the shooting and hugged a person she was with.

Her father, 51-year-old Richard Rodriguez, attends the church "every Sunday." She

SEE COMMUNITY, 10A

Fort Worth pastor knows grief of church shootings

BY DOMINGO RAMIREZ JR.
ramirez@star-telegram.com

FORT WORTH

The Rev. Al Meredith's voice was full of sadness Sunday after he was told the number of deaths in the mass shooting at a South Texas church.

"Oh, no," Meredith said. "It so breaks my heart."

Meredith knows about the grief a church suffers in a mass shooting.

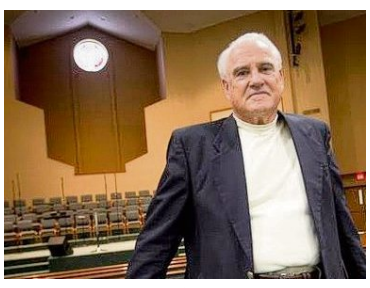
On Sept. 15, 1999, horror struck Fort Worth's Wedgwood Baptist Church when Larry Gene Ashbrook invaded a youth rally carrying 200 rounds of ammunition and a pipe bomb. Before he turned his gun on himself, seven people were dead and seven others injured.

Meredith was the pastor at Wedgwood Baptist. He retired in 2015.

"Many people contact us, ask questions and then apologize for bringing it back up again," Meredith said Sunday in a telephone interview. "But if you can help others through tragedies, we're here."

Meredith said his congregation was able to recover with the

SEE WEDGWOOD, 5A



STAR-TELEGRAM ARCHIVES Courtesy

The Rev. Al Meredith was pastor at Wedgwood Baptist Church in Fort Worth when a gunman opened fire in his church in 1999. He continues to help churches and communities cope with mass shootings.

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